

2026 World Cup: Companies Face Labor Challenges And More

By **Shannon Donnelly, Stephanie Sweitzer and Andrew Gniewek** (March 13, 2024, 4:11 PM EDT)

The 2026 FIFA World Cup, hosted jointly by the U.S., Canada and Mexico, promises to be a spectacular and unprecedented event, involving the movement of thousands of people across borders in the run-up to and during the games.

FIFA's recently released tournament schedule — beginning June 11, 2026, in Mexico City and closing July 19, 2026, in New Jersey, with matches taking place in cities as diverse as Dallas; Los Angeles; Toronto; Guadalajara, Mexico; and Vancouver, Canada — reinforces the vastness and complexities of the event.

Companies participating in the festivities — whether as sponsors, vendors or event organizers — should be proactive in preparing to navigate the many business and legal considerations surrounding the event.

Labor Management Considerations

Planning for the World Cup not only comes amid a rise in labor and social activism and growing support for unions; it is happening in the wake of FIFA's focus on legacy and responsibility.

This has necessitated host city candidates to formulate human rights strategies that align with international standards.

Many host city bidders touted strong relationships with local labor unions and strong labor protections in the form of binding municipal ordinances and resolutions outlining labor rights and protections.

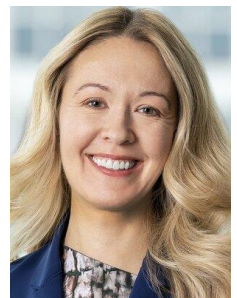
For instance, Philadelphia — home to six matches — communicated a commitment to establish project labor agreements with unions for the run of the event, which would guarantee living wages, safe working conditions and expedited dispute resolution processes.

Unions have signaled expectations to be involved and engaged as important stakeholders in event planning and event execution.

Against this backdrop, companies should strongly consider the following actions:



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- Be cognizant of tournament organizer and host city labor requirements. Companies must be prepared for increased scrutiny and ensure that their labor practices align with local laws and international standards, as well as their own commitments.
- Expect vigorous enforcement from labor and labor allies. Companies must be proactive in engaging with their workforce, addressing concerns and having contingency plans in place to mitigate the impact of any potential disruptions.
- Be sensitive to job action and work stoppage risks. The global stage of the World Cup will provide a platform for labor groups to showcase their causes and push their demands. The risk of job action and work stoppages cannot be ignored.

Immigration Challenges

In the lead-up to the World Cup, companies must adopt a strategic and detailed approach to immigration planning. The scale and complexity of the event require advance preparation to navigate the myriad of immigration requirements in all three host countries.

The U.S., Canada and Mexico each have different procedures that promote the movement of not just athletes, teams and delegations, but also media, event planners, support staff, sponsors, agents and others tied to the event.

The U.S. has an array of visa types, including those for representatives of foreign media, or O-1A visas for persons with "extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business or athletics."

Like the U.S., Canada has streams available to members of media and events teams. Meanwhile, Mexico does not have a separate visa category for athletes or media, and allows travelers with citizenship from the U.S., Canada, Australia, Japan, the U.K. and Schengen-area countries — or those who hold valid visas or permanent residence in these countries — to enter as business visitors as long as their stay does not exceed 180 days.

Planning is a necessity. Companies should establish clear protocols for securing the appropriate visas for their employees, contractors and other personnel well in advance of the World Cup, as well as crisis management strategies in case of last-minute challenges to visa holders.

Managing a Multijurisdictional Workforce

Companies may be thinking of ramping up hiring in or near host cities, expanding their remote workforce to provide support for the event, or moving employees across the U.S. or into Canada or Mexico.

Spanning three countries, the event presents a unique challenge for companies in terms of managing a multijurisdictional workforce. This is particularly true in the U.S., which has a patchwork of increasingly complex federal, state and local employment laws.

For instance, the U.S. has seen an uptick in pay transparency laws requiring employers to include certain information in job postings, such as the projected pay scale of a role or a description of benefits and total compensation.

This trend is expected to continue, making it crucial for companies to track developments to remain in compliance. When hiring for the World Cup, companies may want to decide if it is easier to include this type of pay transparency information in all job postings rather than on a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction basis.

Additionally, an increasing number of cities, including host cities Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Seattle, have predictive scheduling laws that require certain employers to provide advance notice of schedules and schedule changes. The types of businesses covered by these laws vary by jurisdiction.

Companies should also be aware that engaging independent contractors is not without risk. The U.S. Department of Labor recently released its final rule on independent contractor classification, which reinforces that the DOL is paying attention to misclassification of independent contractors.

Many states have their own independent contractor tests — occasionally different tests within the same state, depending on the law at issue — some of which are more employee friendly.

There are many situations where it is appropriate for a company to use independent contractors, but they should be cautious and make sure it is truly an independent contractor relationship.

Companies thinking of moving employees across the border should be aware that Canadian provinces may consider foreign nationals under the protection of applicable provincial employment laws. The same could be true in Mexico, depending on the type of work and how long an employee will be in the country, among other factors.

Establishing a comprehensive understanding of local employment laws, including variations in leave entitlements and pay transparency requirements, is essential to avoid legal pitfalls.

Companies also must be aware of the discrepancies between jurisdictions. What may be acceptable in one host city might be subject to legal scrutiny in another.

Adopting a proactive and adaptive approach to compliance is crucial to ensure that policies and practices align with the unique legal landscapes in each location.

Conclusion

As companies gear up for the 2026 World Cup, proactive planning and meticulous compliance with local regulations will be essential components of a successful strategy. In the midst of the excitement and anticipation surrounding this global event, businesses must remain vigilant and adaptable.

By addressing head-on the challenges presented by heightened labor management concerns, complex immigration rules and a multijurisdictional workforce, companies can not only ensure a seamless and successful participation in the World Cup, but also leave a positive legacy in the host countries and emerge champions in their own right.

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